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Housekeepers' Chat

Thursday, February 20, 1930

Not for Publication

Subject: "A Rest Corner in the Kitchen." From Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Convenient Kitchens," "Home Baking," and "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes."

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Once upon a time I read a news item, written by a certain State Home Management Specialist.

"The average homemaker spends 70 per cent of her time in her kitchen," stated this Home Management Specialist. "She does three acres of dishes, and carries 20 tons of water in a year, if she does not have running water." Surveys in a certain eastern state showed that homemakers were walking from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 11 miles daily in their kitchens alone. One woman carried water for 30 years, and then found it cost only \$3.00 to have running water. Thirty years, of back-breaking work! Isn't that a tragedy?

I hope the State Home Management Specialist told this woman how to make over her kitchen, after the running water was installed. And I hope she has a rest corner in her new kitchen, with a nice comfortable chair, where she can drop down for an occasional rest. She might have a small table or shelf, for her mending basket, and her favorite books. I'd put this rest corner near a sunny window, and have a cheerful maidenhair fern growing nearby. And a red geranium. And pretty gingham curtains.

Have you an old kitchen, that seems hopeless? Let's look it over, and see if something can't be done to improve it.

First, is your kitchen used for the preparation and serving of food, or is it a combination kitchen, laundry, wash room, and dining room? The most convenient kitchen is one in which the necessary work can be done with the least possible effort. The kitchen is above all else, a place to prepare and serve food. Limit it to this use if possible, and arrange for laundering and such work to be done in another place. Many old kitchens are large enough to make two rooms. If you are building or remodeling a kitchen, make it oblong, and with no more floor space than is actually needed. You pay for space, in miles of extra steps.

Next, let's take a look around at the walls and woodwork. Are they dark and gloomy, or light and cheery? Pleasant colors to live with are ivory, tan, light yellow, and warm gray. A nice finish for walls and woodwork is a good quality of washable paint.

Now glance at the floor. Is it smooth, or rough and splintery? The kitchen floor needs a durable finish, or covering, that grease and water will not affect. If the floor is smooth, and without cracks, a paint that does not show tracks, may be used. If the floor is rough, perhaps the best thing to do is to make it smooth, and cover it with linoleum. Linoleum is easy to clean, and comfortable to stand and walk on.

Doors and windows are next. Are they well-placed? A door that swings both ways, between the kitchen and the dining room, or between the kitchen and the pantry, is convenient.

Broad, short windows, placed about 3-1/2 feet above the floor, are probably the best type for most kitchens.

And don't forget to plan for good lighting. Place your electric light fixtures, or your lamp, so that the light will fall on your work table, sink, and stove. In many kitchens, lights are hung from the middle of the ceiling, and the housewife must stand in her own shadow while she works. Sometimes dark, dreary kitchens can be transformed into cheerful workrooms by cutting an additional window, by putting a glass panel in the outside door, or even by painting walls and woodwork a light color.

Now we are ready to consider the equipment that we need, in carrying out the two main kitchen operations; first, preparation, cooking, and serving of food; second, removing food from the dining table, washing the dishes, and putting them away. Kitchen equipment should be carefully grouped, to save steps. For instance, sink, stove, and worktable, should be near together. Scattered equipment means walking many unnecessary miles, during the year. If the kitchen table is on casters, it can be easily moved where needed, thus saving steps.

Another thing we need in our workshop is plenty of well-planned cupboard and shelf space, for storing utensils, and food supplies. Steps can be saved, by grouping similar things, and placing them near the part of the room where they will be used. For instance, keep mixing bowls and spoons, and such dry materials as flour and sugar, near each other, if possible.

And don't forget a rest corner. Find room for a comfortable chair, and a small table or shelf, for books or mending basket.

Now, my story is done, so far as today's subject is concerned. There is a great deal more to say about kitchens, how to make them efficient and pleasant workshops. If you are planning to build a new kitchen, or make over an old one, I shall be glad to send you a book of plans. Even the worst of old kitchens can be made over, in some fashion.

The rest of this program will be devoted to pies - so many people have written to me, lately, wanting directions for pie crust. You'll find a good recipe in the radio cookbook, and also in the baking bulletin.

Do you know why most inexperienced cooks have trouble, when making pie crust? Because they do not get the right proportions of fat, flour, and water, or else they work the dough too long and strenuously, and make their pie crust tough. Any well-flavored fat can be used, but the flakiest crust can be made with lard, or any one of the many good cooking fats or oils now on the market.

Perhaps you would like to have a recipe, today, for a plain pie crust, enough for a two-crust pie, or for two open-face pies. There are four ingredients, in a plain pie crust. Write them down, if you like:

About $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons water, or just enough to make a stiff dough
1- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sifted, soft-wheat flour
5 to 6 tablespoons fat, and
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt.

Better check them, to be sure you have the correct amounts: (Repeat ingredients).

First, sift the flour and the salt together. Then, combine the fat and the flour. Some cooks cut the fat into the flour with two knives, or a pastry fork, or a biscuit cutter, so that the ingredients will not be warmed, by too much handling. However, the best cook I know uses the old-fashioned method of mixing the fat and flour with the tips of her fingers, working very quickly.

When the fat and flour are combined, sprinkle the water over the surface, and work it in with a light motion until evenly mixed. Shape the dough into a ball, either in a bowl, or on a lightly floured board. Divide the dough so that there will be a little over half, for the lower crust. Roll the pastry lightly into a sheet, test the size by inverting the pie tin over it, and allow an additional inch all around beyond the rim. Line the pan with the dough, and see that there are no air pockets between the pan and the dough. Put in the pie filling and roll out the upper crust. Cut slits to allow the steam to escape. Moisten the rim of the undercrust with water, place the top crust in position, and press the two edges together with the thumb or the tines of a fork. Trim off the edges of dough, holding the knife underneath the pie tin at an angle so that the dough will not be cut too close to the edge of the pan. If there is a fruit filling, press the edges together again to prevent the juice from leaking out while the pie is baking.

For open-face pies with only one crust, it is best to bake the crust a delicate brown before the filling is put in. This gives a crisp undercrust. Line the pan as already described, and prick the pastry well over the bottom and sides of the pan before baking. For the lower crust, the oven should be about 450 degrees Fahrenheit. However, a pie with a filling that needs to be cooked, cannot be left long in an oven as hot as this, because the crust bakes too fast for the filling. To cook a two-crust pie with a raw fruit filling, the temperature should be about 450 degrees to start, and then lowered rapidly, after 8 or 10 minutes, so that the filling may cook through, without overcooking the crust.

Friday: "In Honor of George Washington."

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